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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic)

later: Ms. LEONCE-CARRYL (Vice-Chairman) (Saint Lucia)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 87: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

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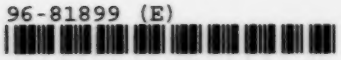

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 87: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/51/21 and A/51/406)

1. Mr. TASOVSKI (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that his delegation agreed with the Secretary-General's observation that the Department of Public Information (DPI) had significantly enhanced its capacity to disseminate public information about the achievements of the United Nations through a variety of media and in different languages. As the Secretary-General's report (A/51/406) pointed out, it was imperative to ensure the transparency of the goals and activities of the United Nations, so as to ensure the best coverage of issues of particular interest to Member States.

2. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia commended the establishment of a consultative mechanism involving DPI and other departments, namely the Department for Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, in order to strengthen the coordination of public information about field operations, especially peacekeeping. The public information function should be further strengthened in order to provide the United Nations with full support in its work in various fields, and his delegation supported the Department's efforts to harness new information technologies, for example the dissemination of information by electronic means. It commended the new UNESCO strategy of support for the free flow of information and better balanced dissemination of information. That was very important for the countries in transition and the developing countries.

3. Many profound changes had taken place in the world in recent years. His delegation was of the view that the United Nations, in particular DPI, should be equipped with adequate tools to respond to the new information challenges, which were closely linked with the ongoing reform of the United Nations system. It noted the important work done by the United Nations information centres (UNIC) in promoting the attainment of the Organization's goals. It supported the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/51/406).

4. Mr. DUMITRIU (Romania) said that Romania subscribed to the comprehensive statement made by Ireland on behalf of the European Union and shared the views expressed therein. The work of UNIC Bucharest continued to attract the attention of public opinion, the mass information media, democratic institutions and numerous non-governmental organizations in Romania. The interest in its work had become so great that the number of documents available no longer met all the requirements and needs. The major Romanian news agencies used the information provided by UNIC Bucharest, as did more than 30 newspapers and periodicals and 10 radio and television stations, which broadcast reports based on DPI audio-visual materials. As a result, more than 3,000 articles and reports on the United Nations were published every year. Their success had been achieved in times of financial difficulties, both for the Department and for the Romanian Government. For a number of years the Government's financial contribution had increased nominally but diminished in real terms. A substantial increase in its contribution to UNIC had been made possible by the recovery of the Romanian economy. It was to be hoped that the increased resources would give a new impetus to the centre's work.

5. There was a need for better coordination of United Nations public information activities by DPI at the local level. Some Bucharest offices of organizations of the United Nations system (UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR), as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, had designated officers to be responsible for public information. Sometimes they duplicated the work of the centre. The Department should therefore assign the centre broader functions for the coordination of public information. Better coordination would help to resolve the question of the availability of some publications. While IAEA, FAO, WFP, UNDP and UNEP continued to provide their documents free of charge, other organizations did not do so. His delegation was confident that DPI, in dialogue with the organizations concerned, would be able to solve the problem. It was to be hoped that it would also be possible to solve another long-standing issue, namely the appointment of a director of UNIC Bucharest, who would have the necessary time to focus on the ever more complex public information challenges.

6. Mr. HRBÁČ (Slovakia) said that the United Nations was a unique forum playing an irreplaceable role in the resolution of the most varied issues on the global scene. Although currently going through a difficult period of reform and sometimes coming under criticism, the United Nations had not lost its importance. There were a number of positive examples of its work; in particular in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, development, humanitarian assistance, promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and codification of international law. In publicizing the activities of the United Nations greater attention should be given to those positive examples in order to enhance the Organization's authority.

7. The Secretariat's Department of Public Information was the focal point of the Organization's public information activities. While Slovakia was fully aware of the necessity to reform the United Nations system, improve its efficiency and cost-effectiveness and adapt it to the new political environment, the severe budgetary restrictions currently facing the Organization must not hinder the Department as it pursued its noble task.

8. The Slovak delegation welcomed the report of the Committee on Information (A/51/21). It provided a summary of the views expressed by Member States at the Committee's eighteenth session, while draft resolution B outlined all the steps which needed to be taken to cope with the major issues of current United Nations public information policy. His delegation endorsed draft resolution B since the text took due account of the differing proposals and represented a reliable basis for future DPI activities.

9. His delegation took note with satisfaction of paragraphs 9 and 18 of draft resolution B, which reaffirmed the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres, particularly in countries in transition. Since the United Nations information centres were the display window of the Organization's achievements in many countries of the world, they could hardly be replaced by any other means of public communication. Integration of the United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations system in general was expected to ensure that the mandate of the centres was effectively carried out. However, such measures should be carried out on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the need to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of the United Nations information centres were not adversely affected.

10. Slovakia wished to ensure a steady flow of information on United Nations activities to all its citizens, especially the younger generation. It therefore requested that a United Nations information resources centre should be opened in its capital, Bratislava, and looked forward to cooperating with the Department of Public Information (DPI) in that respect in the hope that the information centre in Bratislava would become operational in the next few months.

11. The introduction of new electronic communication technologies was an important means of enabling DPI and its field offices to deal with unfavourable financial circumstances, ensure effective programme delivery and increase the positive impact of the Organization's activities on the world community. In that connection, his delegation greatly appreciated the recent introduction of the United Nations home page on the Internet, which provided comprehensive information about the Organization and its work.

12. His delegation welcomed the proposal of DPI concerning the draft project document entitled Study of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. The process of choosing experts to conduct such a study should be as transparent as possible and should ensure the independence of the proposed study.

13. Since 1991, there had been four DPI/UNESCO-sponsored regional seminars for the promotion of independent and pluralistic media. His delegation took note with satisfaction of paragraph 28 of draft resolution B and encouraged DPI to provide assistance in mobilizing the support of various funding sources for the preparation and organization of a regional seminar on that subject in Central and Eastern Europe in 1997. His delegation also appreciated the offer of the Government of Bulgaria to hold such a seminar.

14. His delegation welcomed the provisions of paragraph 24 of draft resolution B, which requested DPI to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours. It supported the efforts of the Chairman of the Committee on Information, as formulated in his letter of 10 October 1996 addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, containing a request to review an earlier decision to limit the size of tour groups, with a view to increasing the size of such groups to 25, while satisfying the needs of security.

15. Mr. APUNTE (Ecuador) expressed his appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on questions relating to information (A/51/406), which referred to the important work carried out by DPI in providing objective and positive information on the work of the United Nations. His delegation endorsed the view expressed in that document that timely and objective information facilitated decision-making. Although that statement appeared in the document in the context of peacekeeping operations, it also applied to other United Nations activities, in particular those involving cooperation for economic and social development.

16. The report also contained detailed information on the activities of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. However, while it was necessary to support those activities, a balanced approach should be taken with respect to other areas of United Nations activities, in particular those in the economic and social fields, where issues such as poverty, hunger, the lack of medical services, epidemics and the other consequences of underdevelopment called for

timely consideration and analysis. One important task of the United Nations was that of providing States, Governments, non-governmental organizations and representatives of public organizations with better information with a view to seeking solutions to urgent problems encountered by most of the world's countries, promoting international assistance and implementing specific economic and social programmes and projects at the national, regional and international levels.

17. His delegation endorsed the statement by the representative of the Group of 77 and China, in particular the concern that certain mandates entrusted to the Secretariat in earlier General Assembly resolutions had not been properly carried out.

18. Mr. MENKES (Russian Federation) said that the agenda of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly reflected the contradictory nature of the stage through which mankind was currently passing. The international community was moving from confrontation between blocs to multipolarity, economic interdependence and the democratization of international relations. Profound changes were also taking place in the field of information.

19. There was currently a keen awareness in the Russian Federation of how important the "fourth estate" was. The idea that there could be no democratic State without a free press had become generally accepted among the Russian population, and a new information environment that was essentially in keeping with international standards was becoming firmly established.

20. The role of the media as an important means of promoting democratic change had been clearly demonstrated during the Russian presidential election held in 1996. The constitutional legislative guarantees of information rights and freedoms had once again been put into practice. The rules for the conduct of pre-election campaigning in the media had been strictly observed as set forth, in particular, in article 24 of the 1994 Federal Act on Basic Guarantees of the Election Rights of Citizens of the Russian Federation.

21. Ideological pluralism was one of the most important attainments of the new Russia, which attached great importance to providing journalists with access to information on the work of State bodies and ensuring that journalists of the regional and local media were better informed. The Russian Federation was also paying a great deal of attention to the problems of journalists themselves and to their legal protection and social support. The Federal Act on Information, Computerization and Protection of Information, adopted in 1995, included a mechanism for the legal protection of the right of the Russian Federation's citizens and the media to access to information of public information.

22. At the same time, there remained the very acute problem of the financial survival of the media in a market economy and their ability to maintain their independence. The State was making considerable efforts to resolve those and other problems in the information field. Over the past year and a half, the Russian Federation had adopted a series of instruments that provided for economic support and substantial financial concessions to the media and publishing and printing firms.

23. The development of democratic standards for freedom of information traditionally ranked high among the Organization's activities. One important forum for the exchange of views on such matters was the Committee on Information, the eighteenth session of which had reaffirmed that the international community still had many problems to solve in the information field. The situation was further complicated by the Organization's financial crisis, which meant that activities has to be curtailed and programmes cut.

24. For several years running, the Committee on Information had been working on the basis of consensus, and it had managed to retain that approach at its eighteenth session. However, from year to year, that process was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain at the Committee's sessions. The current situation and the persistent lack of balance there in the information field were by no means to the advantage of the developing States.

25. At the May session, his delegation had reiterated that it was mindful of and sympathetic to the concerns of the non-aligned countries. The Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, which was the Organization's main coordinating centre in the information field, had an important contribution to make in that regard. His delegation shared the favourable opinion of the work of the Department as a whole that had been expressed during the discussion of the Secretary-General's report on questions relating to information. Areas of work in the field of information that attracted attention included the enhancement of the activities of the United Nations information centres and the provision of information on peacekeeping operations. Another area was the introduction of the latest information technology by all possible means.

26. His delegation considered that the countries in transition had their own specific problems and interests in the information field, and it hoped that the international community would give them the attention they deserved. The world press should provide adequate coverage of the complex changes taking place in those countries, and measures should be taken to promote free and pluralistic media. In that context, the holding of a regional seminar on pluralistic and independent media in Eastern Europe in cooperation with UNESCO should be useful.

27. His delegation attached great importance to the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow (UNIC Moscow), which had recently become more active and varied. The Information Centre was strengthening its ties with government bodies, Russian political, social, business and scientific circles and the media in Moscow and the regions. Nevertheless, the staffing situation in UNIC Moscow was not in keeping with the needs of its activities. The post of its chief had been artificially reduced to the P-5 level and, in the light of that fact, his delegation had drawn attention to the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations information centres that had been prepared for the eighteenth session of the Committee on Information (A/AC.198/1996/2). It was clear from the annex to that report that, in the capitals of seven countries, the United Nations information centres were headed by United Nations staff members occupying D-1 level posts. Moreover, the scope and importance of the activities of UNIC Moscow were hardly any different from those of the aforementioned seven information centres.

28. The use of the Russian language was a matter of great importance. The survey of DPI publications at the eighteenth session of the Committee on Information had shown that there was only a limited number of United Nations publications in Russian. The situation with respect to the use of Russian in other areas of the Organization's information activities was exactly the same. While his delegation was certainly aware of the limitations imposed on DPI by the financial crisis, it nevertheless wished to emphasize, once again, that the Organization's current level of use of the Russian language, which was a means of communication not only in the Russian Federation but was also used by the many millions of citizens of other States Members of the United Nations, especially the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, could not be regarded as adequate.

29. The international community had recently commemorated a sad date, the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. In that connection, on the initiative of the delegations of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, a series of information activities and other events had been held at United Nations Headquarters. At the same time, those three delegations had called upon the international community not to lose sight of that problem in the future and, at the Committee on Information's eighteenth session had introduced a paragraph on that subject in a draft resolution. His delegation thanked all countries that were members of the Committee for their understanding and support, which had made it possible to include the aforementioned paragraph in the consensus package.

30. Mr. ZAKI (Egypt) said that the current scientific and technological advances in the field of communication meant that the United Nations should respond more rapidly to the tasks that those new technologies set for the Organization. In that regard, he noted the success of DPI in harnessing new information technologies. His delegation reaffirmed the importance it attached to ensuring that States received all essential services in the field of information, in spite of their limited resources, and welcomed the Secretary-General's report on questions relating to information and the report of the Committee on Information.

31. It was essential to ensure the independence of the activities of the United Nations information centres so that they could serve as a link between the United Nations and the peoples of the countries concerned. The importance of the information centres was increasing owing to the fact that many countries, particularly the developing countries, were unable to introduce new information technologies on their own.

32. His delegation supported what had been said about the need to improve the services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. The necessary resources should be allocated in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. At the same time, the traditional means of disseminating information remained essential and were of great importance for the overwhelming majority of developing countries. On the subject of the Organization's publishing activities, his delegation reaffirmed the importance it attached to the use of the six official languages, and it regretted the reduction in the range of materials published in the Arabic language.

33. With respect to the Department's programme for Palestine, his delegation was concerned that the only concrete measure that programme provided was the training of Palestinian journalists. His delegation hoped that the six components of the programme would be fully carried out, and expressed its conviction that the majority of States taking part in the vote on a resolution on that question would support it, since the question of Palestine remained unresolved. The peace process in the Middle East region was encountering serious problems, and the Palestinian people were still isolated and could not exercise their legitimate rights. In that regard, his delegation requested DPI to continue its efforts, together with the Palestinian people, to implement all aspects of the programme for Palestine, particularly activities involving the dispatch of fact-finding missions to the occupied territories.

34. Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) said that his delegation fully subscribed to the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77. He was pleased to note the increasing coordination and cooperation between the Department of Public Information and other departments of the Secretariat and hoped that that process would enable the Department of Public Information to pursue more effectively its mandate, which was to promote the greatest understanding of the activities of the United Nations throughout the world. For all that, the Department should be more balanced in its coverage of the activities of the Organization, which were of great interest to the majority of Member States. In that connection, he noted with regret that the Department had ceased issuing press releases on the work of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and that there were no items relating to decolonization on the United Nations Home Page on the Internet. Those lapses were a matter of serious concern to his delegation and to several others, as had been indicated in the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77. He called on the Department of Public Information to address that problem immediately.

35. It was to the credit of the Department of Public Information that, despite serious financial constraints, it was continuing to carry out its important programme of guided tours at Headquarters, as well as other measures, to organize seminars and to issue many publications. It was also important that the Department, in cooperation with other departments and United Nations agencies, was endeavouring to keep abreast of technological developments in the information sector and to share the technology acquired with Member States, mainly through the Permanent Missions, almost 120 of which were already connected to the Internet through the UNDP dial-in service. His Government attached the greatest importance to the work of the United Nations Information Centres. Despite its serious economic constraints, it continued to provide free premises for the Information Centre in Accra.

36. His delegation had noted with interest the proposal of the Department of Public Information with regard to the request of the Committee on Information for an evaluation of the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. It had thought that the Department had wisely given due consideration to the need for transparency and the reflection of different points of view in the selection of consultants to conduct the evaluation.

37. The tremendous impact of information technology on social and economic development, culture, education, health, human rights and other spheres of interest could not be over-emphasized. That explained his delegation's deep interest in all activities that might be undertaken to ensure that developing countries, with the assistance of the United Nations system, benefited fully from the information revolution. However despite repeated calls for a new international information and communication order, the rich industrially developed countries of the North and the developing countries of the South still did not have equal access to information technology; that created a deeper divide between information "haves" and "have nots". A small number of powerful companies in countries of the North retained monopolies in the sphere of communications and engaged in biased reporting on events within the developing world, where communication had received the attention of the participants in the Fifth Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Abuja, Nigeria, in September 1996.

38. Mr. AL-RUMAIHA (Qatar) said that, on the threshold of a new millennium, the idea had arisen of establishing a new world order which would ensure peace, security, development, stability and prosperity for all mankind. The mass information media were called upon to play an enormous role in that connection, using the most modern technology and means of communication, including electronic communication and satellite communication. For that new world, it was also necessary to have a new world information and communication order, characterized by the presence of a new information strategy, which would ensure the free flow of information and equal access to the information capital available.

39. In that connection, it was essential to resolve the questions relating to the inequality of rights of the industrialized countries and the developing countries in the field of information. The developing countries must be given access to communication technology. They must be helped to strengthen regional and international information and communication networks and to create new information centres in the regions which would allow increased activity in that field and ensure the creation of a new information and communication culture. Such a strategy in the information field should also provide for the pluralism and independence of the mass information media. In that connection, he expressed appreciation to the Department of Public Information for holding a seminar in Sana'a, Yemen, in January 1996 with the participation of UNESCO. That seminar had led to new approaches to problems in the field of information and communication in the Arab countries. Qatar, for its part, had recently adopted a new strategy in the field of information and communication, based on the principles of the freedom, objectivity and accuracy of information.

40. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ-SIFUENTES (Mexico) said that, in the current circumstances of an increasingly interdependent world, the strengthening of international cooperation in the exchange of information was becoming particularly important. In that connection, her delegation supported the draft resolution on information in the service of humanity, submitted by the Committee on Information. It believed that one of the most important elements underlying the Committee's work was a more equitable and effective international information and communication order, aimed at strengthening international peace and mutual understanding. The broader and more effective dissemination of information on United Nations measures would help to confirm the positive attitude of public opinion to the

aims and purposes of the Organization. At the same time, careful consideration should be given to the question of how the Department of Public Information would carry out a greater volume of work with reduced resources, as the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, Mr. Samir Sanbar, had stated at the previous meeting.

41. Her delegation had carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/51/406) and noted with particular satisfaction the work on the dissemination of information on such extremely important areas of activity as development, decolonization and disarmament, which the Department was carrying out with the limited resources at its disposal. The dissemination of information on questions relating to disarmament enabled public opinion to follow carefully efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, which posed a threat to the very survival of humanity. Moreover, primary attention should be paid to activities relating to the dissemination of information on United Nations peacekeeping operations.

42. Activities relating to the dissemination of information on the United Nations was undoubtedly one of the fundamental means of supporting the authority of the Organization, and the strengthening of those activities was a complex task which was in keeping with the purposes and principles of the Organization and encompassed the very varied areas of United Nations activities.

43. Mr. ZAKARIA (Indonesia) said that with the emergence of new and advanced communications technologies, the very concept of national borders had become obsolete and nations and peoples were linked together as never before in history. The application of fibre optics technology had transformed the world into a single information area, with all its ramifications. There was great potential for solving some of the critical problems facing mankind, such as promoting international peace and development. However, the current world information and communication system was still characterized by an imbalanced flow of information and lack of access of developing countries to communications technologies. While developed nations were successfully applying the principle of the "free flow of information", the call of developing nations for a "free and balanced flow of information" had largely gone unheeded. In many cases information was being utilized to serve the interests of the developed nations to the detriment of developing countries.

44. The situation had created a virtual monopoly of a small number of States in that important field. Developing nations were currently operating less than 25 per cent of the world media disseminating information to their own communities while 75 per cent of the media from developed countries disseminated information to the global population. That dominance was being used to promote their economic, political, social and other interests, which were in many instances incompatible with the interests of developing countries.

45. The participants at the Fifth Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries had stressed the need to establish a new world information and communication order on the basis of the principles of independence, progress, democracy and mutual cooperation. The Conference had emphasized the strengthening of South-South cooperation, which was not intended to replace North-South cooperation but to enhance the principle of collective self-reliance. In that regard, it had proposed that international information

centres of non-aligned countries should be established to complement the efforts of the non-aligned news agencies pool and their broadcasting organizations.

46. The pressing question of a balanced flow of information had been considered within the framework of the topic entitled "Communication in the service of humanity" at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in 1995. The participants had indicated that the utilization of information technology within the global communications network exerted a great deal of influence on social, cultural and economic life in both developed and developing countries. His delegation appreciated the efforts of UNESCO to assist developing countries in enhancing their communication and information capabilities and in facilitating access to technologies through the International Programme for the Development of Communication. Furthermore, Indonesia commended the Department of Public Information and UNESCO for holding training programmes and seminars for journalists from developing countries. His delegation was pleased to note that a seminar for countries in Central and Eastern Europe was to be held in Bulgaria in 1997.

47. For its part, Indonesia had endeavoured to enhance multilateral, regional and bilateral cooperation with other like-minded States in order to promote information technology among developing nations, especially non-aligned countries, member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and neighbouring Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Indonesia had also carried out communication and information training programmes for media personnel from countries of the Asian Pacific and African regions through technological cooperation among developing countries. His delegation supported the efforts of the Department of Public Information to inform the world public about the activities of the United Nations. Indonesia believed that the Department should be strengthened so that it could meet the new challenges facing the Organization in the post-cold-war era. It also noted the Department's successes, such as the dissemination of information through the Internet and CD-ROM, and also the issuance of publications such as the Blue Books Series, the Yearbook of the United Nations, the UN Chronicle and others.

48. Mr. RI (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the need for the establishment of a new international order in the political and economic fields as well as in information and communication was being increasingly felt and his delegation considered that the process of the establishment of the new order should be commensurate with the trend of globalization of information and communications. Inequality between developed and developing countries in the field of information continued to be a hindrance to the formation of new and fair international relations. While some developed countries were taking advantage of their monopoly of modern information and communication technology, developing countries did not enjoy their due share in international information activities. The United Nations should pay attention to that situation and take active measures to resolve it.

49. International efforts were needed to develop the national information system in developing countries in order to reform the existing international structure of information and create a new international information order. In that respect the United Nations should continue to pay close attention to strengthening national information centres and training technicians and experts of developing countries. The United Nations information centres could play an

important role in facilitating contacts and cooperation between developing countries and the United Nations in the field of information. His delegation felt that in considering the question of integrating United Nations information centres into local UNDP offices, full account should be taken of the views of the countries concerned.

50. The Department of Public Information should make sure that all of its publications contained objective and accurate information. It was regrettable that the information on the Korean question contained in some of the Department's publications was quite contrary to historical facts.

51. The efforts of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to contribute to the development of world information and establish a new international information and communication order should be duly noted. Both the Fourth Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries held in Pyongyang in June 1993 and the Fifth Conference held in Abuja in September 1996 had stressed the imbalance of relations in the field of international information and urged the international community to participate actively in the establishment of a new international order in the field of information and communication. The participants at the Fifth Conference had agreed to establish new international information centres in several member countries as an important step towards strengthening South-South cooperation in the field of information and communication, based on the principle of collective self-reliance. His delegation believed that the establishment of the information centres within the context of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries would promote inter and intra-regional cooperation in the field of information and communication and also contribute to the revitalization of the information and communication organizations of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the establishment of an equitable new international information and communication order.

52. Mr. GUANI (Uruguay) said that his delegation fully shared the view of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information that the dissemination of information on questions relating to international development continued to be a priority. However, the increasing shortage of resources and the administrative and other limitations were an obstacle to the full implementation of activities in that area. Those working with the media must be guaranteed the right to carry out their professional obligations freely and effectively.

53. With regard to the work of the Department of Public Information, his delegation continued to be concerned about the financial situation in the Secretariat. Although, as noted in the report of the Committee on Information, the Department was successfully maintaining an appropriate quality in its work despite limited resources, such strategic areas of activity as health, problems relating to poverty and development, disarmament and the maintenance of international peace and security were extremely important and the difficult financial situation should therefore not be used as a pretext for reducing the effectiveness of work in those areas. In that connection, in considering the relevant sections of the proposed programme budget for the biennium, the Organization should make the general needs known and appropriate the resources necessary to meet them.

54. One of the most important goals was the achievement of progress within the Interdepartmental Working Group on Media Strategies for Peacekeeping and Other

Field Operations on the initiative regarding the inclusion of information components in peacekeeping operations, which could cover rapidly deployable forces and could help to ensure that the Department of Public Information was represented in such operations.

55. His delegation believed that, after consultation with the Governments of the host countries and with the appropriate departments of the organizations of the system, information centres in developing countries should be combined with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

56. His delegation was pleased to note the existence of the United Nations Home Page on the Internet. Other effective ways of informing public opinion were exhibitions devoted to such important problems as the catastrophic consequences of the use of anti-personnel land mines. Uruguay had participated in the mine-clearing work in Mozambique and Angola and Uruguayan field personnel had shown the useful role played by United Nations programmes for the dissemination of information. The great significance of United Nations video materials should also be noted, in particular, as should the contribution of the guided tours programme to the work of the Organization.

57. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) emphasized the enormous role played by the Department of Public Information not only in publicizing the activities of the United Nations, but also in setting up a dialogue between peoples, and he was gratified to note the new spirit which had begun to permeate the work of the Department in recent years. Among the many activities undertaken by the Department, mention should be made of the seminar held in Sana'a, Yemen, at which a Declaration had been adopted on the media in Arab countries.

58. His delegation supported the statement made by the representative of the Group of 77 and wished to make a few comments. First, the establishment of a new world information and communication order entailed consequences for the free exchange of information and the freedom of the press and should be based on respect for the sovereignty of countries and non-interference in their internal affairs. Second, respect for the traditions and cultures of other peoples meant that the influence of information on the formation of public opinion should not be used to discredit peoples with a different culture. Third, in the dissemination of information, it was essential to demonstrate objectivity, impartiality and an absence of bias. Fourth, it was important to offer technical cooperation to the developing countries in the field of information, so that they could have a balanced and fair exchange of information with the developed countries. Fifth, the financial crisis of the United Nations should not be used as a pretext for preventing the Department from carrying out its functions and disseminating information on such problems as the question of Palestine.

59. From the time it had been established, the Department had attached due significance to the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. Recent events showed that peace had not yet been established in the region. The situation of the Palestinian Arabs in the occupied territories was deteriorating on account of the intensification of repression. It was for that reason that the Department should make the facts widely known and emphasize the importance of ensuring a just and lasting peace in the region.

60. The Syrian Arab Republic, as a developing country and a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, was convinced that a new world information and communication order could contribute to its development and, with that in mind, it had established a national information centre, which was responsible for informing the public about the problems within the country. Information in the Syrian Arab Republic was subject to only one censor - the censor of conscience, and freedom of the press was an integral part of the fundamental freedoms in that country.

61. Mr. ABDULLAH AHMAD (Malaysia) said that the current imbalance in the flow of information between the developed and the developing countries led to the distortion of information and prevented the vast majority of the world's population from becoming part of the global information-based society. Freedom of the press, which was widely touted as a basic democratic principle, was not a license for a group of Western-controlled media to manipulate and manage information. Societal values were already being eroded by the abuse of advances in communication and information technology. The desire to maximize profits was being promoted to the extreme, without regard for the political, religious and cultural sensitivities of communities, wherever they were located. Abuse of the ubiquitous Internet system must be stopped immediately. A code of conduct must be developed to regulate the flow of information.

62. Although the Internet had become one of the most important modern means of communication, the developing countries' access to it was limited by their insufficient infrastructure. In that connection, it was important not to lose sight of the traditional media such as hard copy, publications, radio and television. The work of the United Nations Information Centres was of special importance, particularly in the developing countries. His delegation welcomed their integration with UNDP field offices, but that should be done in consultation with the host country. The Interdepartmental Working Group on Media Strategies for Peacekeeping and Other Field Operations continued to play an important role in improving coordination and provided a useful mechanism for advance planning of the activities of public information components in the field.

63. Mr. SKRYPKO (Belarus) recalled that a series of special commemorative events had been held on 25-26 April 1996 at United Nations Headquarters in observance of the International Day of Remembrance to mark the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident. Many of those events had aimed at broadening the international public's awareness of the consequences of the tragedy. Thanks in large measure to the information activities of DPI, people all over the world had been made aware once again that Chernobyl was a global tragedy, the repercussions of which could only be overcome through the common efforts of the world community. The findings of a number of international conferences held to assess the impact of the Chernobyl accident had clearly shown not only that the lives and health of millions of people continued to be negatively affected, but that the after-effects were starting to get much worse. Striking a balance of information priorities continued to be a problem in the work of the United Nations: there was too much emphasis on the technological aspects of the consequences of the accident, the question of nuclear power plant safety and concern for the future of the nuclear power industry, with less attention devoted to the medical and environmental repercussions of the disaster, the main burden of which was borne by Belarus.

64. The work of the United Nations Office in Belarus was very important. The Office had made an appreciable contribution to broadening mutually beneficial dialogue and cooperation between the United Nations and various Belarusian institutions and departments. His Government supported the steps taken by DPI to integrate information centres into UNDP field offices and stressed that the views of host country Governments should be taken into account in the decision-making process with respect to such integration, as should the specific circumstances in each individual case. His delegation also endorsed the further intensification of efforts by the Department to highlight the economic problems facing States with transitional economies. He welcomed the fact that the Department had taken advantage of new opportunities for the preparation and timely distribution of information materials by electronic means. In order to ensure access by national users to international information flows, his Government was very keen for the United Nations Office in Minsk to provide specialist advisory, financial and technical assistance in setting up a Belarusian server on the Internet and training suitable national personnel in how to use it. Holding a regional seminar on independent and pluralist mass media for the countries of Eastern and Central Europe in 1997 would also be an important step in establishing and strengthening national mass media along genuinely democratic lines. The value of such seminars would be greatly enhanced if study courses and training schemes for representatives of national mass media from the above-mentioned States were organized at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

65. Bearing in mind the importance of disseminating truthful and objective information regarding peacekeeping operations in conflict zones for the success of individual missions, his Government supported the recommendation of the Committee on Information on the need to include an information component in peacekeeping operations at the earliest planning stage.

66. Mr. SAI (Algeria) said that one of the most significant features of the next century would be the control of information and communications. However, the current state of international relations and apportionment of the communications and information infrastructure were such that his delegation had been forced to conclude that the existing inequities would continue for some time to come. That explained why, for a number of years, there had been legitimate calls for the establishment of a new world information order. Needless to say, that demand formed a logical part of a wider demand to create a totally new world order.

67. While supporting the statement made by the representative of the Group of 77, his delegation wished to dwell on some of the more interesting points in that statement. First, his delegation could not accept the idea floated by certain countries that the managerial staff at information centres, their tasks and the nature of their functions, should be reviewed with a view to downsizing them. Secondly, DPI should concentrate its attention on issues of decolonization and social and economic development. Thirdly, while welcoming the idea of strengthening the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, his delegation believed that any new assessment of its activity should be carried out with the participation of one or more experts from developing countries. Finally, regarding the programme of DPI with regard to Palestine, it was essential to note the provision of technical assistance to Palestinian mass media, in

particular through the organization of courses of instruction and in-service training for Palestinian journalists.

68. Ms. NGUYEN THI NHA (Viet Nam) said that her delegation had carefully studied the Report on the Committee on Information (A/51/21) and thanked the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (A/51/406). The inter-relationship between peace, security and development in the present period of change and reform had been clearly demonstrated at the United Nations. In that regard, the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of economic and social development should be the primary and most important tasks of the Organization. Information had a crucial role to play in the implementation of those tasks, especially in the United Nations reform process. Her delegation welcomed the efforts of DPI to streamline staff, diversify its media outreach and develop its broadcasting and publishing activities. However, further reform of DPI was essential to ensure that each publication had a well-defined target audience, sales and marketing were enhanced and cost-effectiveness of production was improved. Compared to United Nations peacekeeping operations, development had not yet been given due attention or received the same sort of coverage in publications.

69. Side by side with measures to introduce new information technologies, for example using the Internet and CD-ROMs to offer comprehensive information about the United Nations and its work to a wider audience, it was essential to continue supporting and using various traditional mass media such as printed matter, radio and television, bearing in mind the diversity and different level of development of countries around the world. Since information was a double-edged weapon, it was essential that information should be quickly accessible while remaining reliable, accurate, and respectful of each country's cultural space. It was time for the international community to draw up an international code of conduct on information flow.

70. United Nations information centres played a significant role in disseminating information. Her delegation welcomed the efforts that had been made to integrate those information centres into UNDP field offices whenever feasible, while taking account of the host country's views. Information centres should provide a link between the United Nations and the peoples of the world. They should be a mechanism for transferring information technology to developing countries, for example through the provision of computers linked to the Internet and United Nations databases. In countries which did not have information centres, DPI should give high priority to providing them with more information materials, professional staff and other assistance with a view to diminishing the information gap between developed and developing countries and promoting the development and use of a communications infrastructure.

71. The enormous cost of and rapid change in information and communications technology were posing immense financial and technical difficulties, thus increasing the gap between developed and developing countries in that field. A handful of States had a virtual monopoly on the gathering, analysis and dissemination of information. At the present time some 75 per cent of the mass media were controlled by the developed countries. As had been pointed out by the Fifth Conference of Ministers on Information and Communication of Non-Aligned Countries held in Abuja, Nigeria, in September, developing countries had been unable to gain access to the advanced technology then needed for their

development not simply because they were impoverished materially and economically, but because they lacked equitable opportunities in the field of global information and communication. DPI should therefore spare no effort to redress the imbalance and eliminate the inequality in the information sphere which affected most developing countries. A new, more just information order should be established which would respect the cultural and social values and the identity and sovereignty of all States. There was consequently an urgent need to consider the establishment of a new, more just and effective world information and communication order based on the free and balanced dissemination of information.

72. Mr. TAPIA (Chile) said that the present session of the General Assembly was taking place against the background of a grave financial crisis in the United Nations which directly affected the capabilities of DPI. At such a critical and decisive time, it was necessary to radically improve the public's perception of the United Nations and its work. As the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information had noted, the Organization would only receive the support it deserved and which it so needed if its objectives were clear and it could react effectively to criticism. His Government therefore reiterated its full support for the work of DPI, the importance of which was recognized by everyone.

73. Regarding the specific work of the Department, his delegation hoped that it would resume the practice of preparing round-ups of press reports about the work of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Counties and Peoples. In addition, his delegation believed that it would be advisable to include a specific section devoted to decolonization in the United Nations home page on the Internet.

74. The rapid development of technology encouraged the opening of new channels of communication. Never before had information been so important. At the same time, problems had developed as a result of differences between developing and developed countries which were impossible to ignore. The lack of access to new technologies in the communications sphere had had a negative impact on developing countries' capacity to disseminate information about their views and cultural and ethical values. Taking that fact into account, the appeal to establish a new world information and communication order had become especially topical. The participants at the Fifth Conference of Ministers of Information and Communication of Non-Aligned Countries held from 3 to 6 September in Abuja, Nigeria, had resolutely supported that appeal. They noted that, despite the efforts that had been made over a number of years to establish such an order, the most important objectives had still not been attained. The reason was the limited resources and capabilities in the field of information and communications at the global level, which had a negative impact on developing countries. The Ministers of Information of the Non-Aligned Countries had also confirmed the principles of independence, progress, democracy and cooperation as the basis for the new information and communication order.

75. Mr. SIMOES (Brazil) said that, since the next century would be the age of information, new challenges in the area of public information faced the United Nations. It was very important to disseminate to a world audience information concerning United Nations activities as well as the principles enshrined in the Charter.

76. His delegation reaffirmed its support for DPI and commended it for its innovative approaches to the execution of its tasks as well as the professionalism of its staff members. DPI was using the most sophisticated information capabilities, thus improving its access to information housed in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. There had been a considerable improvement in both the quality and the speed of issue of press releases, which were now also available on the Internet. In addition, it was important to improve the quality of guided tours by using guides with the widest possible range of languages.

77. His delegation also recognized the important role of public information in the context of peacekeeping operations. Cambodia, Mozambique and Angola were examples of the importance of information in consolidating the peace process. The activities currently being undertaken by DPI concerning the peace process in the Middle East and assistance to the Palestinian people had also played a vital role.

78. Much had been said about the importance of new technologies in helping to disseminate information. It should be recalled that in developing countries traditional media like radio had a special role to play. It was important to enhance the work of United Nations radio services. An agreement between Radiobras (the Brazilian public radio network) and the United Nations Radio and Central News Service had enabled 150 million Brazilians to listen to broadcasts in Portuguese. New agreements had also been signed with other Portuguese-speaking countries. There were plans to broadcast the Portuguese programme of the United Nations radio service in seven countries in three continents.

79. He reaffirmed his delegation's support for the DPI initiative to strengthen the system of United Nations information centres, which played a pivotal role in the dissemination of a positive image of the United Nations all over the world. Information centres were even more important to developing countries where, because of insufficient financial and human resources, the mass media did not have easy access to information. Bearing that in mind, DPI must take all necessary measures to fulfil its mandate to establish and staff information centres in developing countries. With reference to the integration of information centres with UNDP field offices, his delegation stressed that the functional independence and integral fulfilment of their respective mandates must be guaranteed. Moreover, such integration must be pursued on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the host Government.

80. Mrs. Leonce-Carryl (Saint Lucia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

81. Mr. AL-OMRAN (United Arab Emirates) said that recent events had shown the importance of information and the mobilization of public resources at the national, regional and international levels. Scientific, technical and cultural progress and the information revolution of the past decade had made the mass media an important instrument and a true reflection of current international realities in places, especially in developing countries, undergoing civil wars and conflicts. The developed countries must assist the developing countries in introducing modern means of communication and exchange of information with which to resolve their economic, social and humanitarian problems.

82. The United Arab Emirates attached great importance to the question of information, especially as it applied to economic, social and humanitarian

development to meet the demands of the modern era. The political leadership of the United Arab Emirates had played a constructive role, passing laws which provided for a variety of sources of information on the basis of freedom of the press and the encouragement of intellectual and spiritual development in accordance with the principles of Islam and the country's cultural heritage.

83. Trustworthiness and openness were two basic characteristics of objective information. Therefore, the international community must combat disinformation that presented the problems of the third world and the true nature of Muslim beliefs, which to a certain degree had made possible the foundation of modern civilization, in a false light.

84. As the twenty-first century draws near, the United Nations must use information as a means to publicize the issues it was facing in the economic, social and political fields, including peacekeeping operations. His delegation expressed its satisfaction with the quality of the implementation of programmes for the dissemination of information about priority issues. The Department of Public Information, however, had been unable to implement successfully a number of important programmes and General Assembly resolution 50/84 concerning the dissemination of information on all aspects of the question of Palestine. That stirred up unrest in the Near East, which was undergoing important political changes which DPI should support through assistance to the overall peace process. The United Arab Emirates, while fully aware of the need for economies in spending by the Secretariat, believed that the new policy must not adversely affect substantive programmes of DPI.

85. The United Arab Emirates underlined the importance of global cooperation in establishing a new world information and communication order that would be able to resolve global problems in the interests of peace, security, stability and progress.

86. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the representatives of Israel and Kuwait should be included in the list of speakers, at their request.

87. It was so decided.

88. Miss AL-SALIM (Kuwait) said that DPI was doing a great deal of work in publicizing measures taken by the United Nations in the political, economic, social and intellectual fields among the peoples of the world. She stressed the importance of cooperation between DPI and the Committee on Information.

89. DPI played an important role in promoting dialogue and understanding between the peoples of the world, and awareness of the fact that the United Nations was not just a political forum or a mechanism for maintaining peace, but a world organization defending the interests of economic and social development. The Department had done everything possible to keep up with the times: the Internet allowed delegations to receive information or publications.

90. The radical changes which had taken place in the world demanded corresponding efforts in the area of information. It was more important than ever that all Member States should ensure free movement and exchange of information and take measures to narrow the gap in communications technology between developed and developing countries. Information must not be used as a

means of control or of imposing a certain culture or ideology on other countries. In view of the growing responsibilities of DPI and its shortage of resources, Kuwait called on all Member States to pay their assessments to the United Nations budget in full and on time, as to enable the Organization to fulfil its obligations.

91. She expressed the hope that DPI would continue to pay appropriate attention to programmes related to the question of Palestine as called for in General Assembly resolutions, among them resolution 50/84 C adopted in 1995. For its part, Kuwait would continue to cooperate in every way with the United Nations and all parties concerned in the achievement of common goals.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.